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3

COLOR-BLIND RACISM AND RACIAL INDIFFERENCE: THE ROLE OF RACIAL APATHY IN FACILITATING ENDURING INEQUALITIES



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THE CIVIL RIGHTS movement prompted several important changes in American society. One significant change has been the decline in overt expressions of racial prejudice over the past four decades (Schuman et al. 1997). This decline has led some observers to argue that white racial antipathy has virtually disappeared in the United States (D'Souza 1995; Steele 1990; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Others have argued, however, that rather than an actual *disappearance* in white racial antipathy, there has instead been a change in its *expression* (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Dovidio 2001; Forman 2001; Gould 1999; Myers and Williamson 2001; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Sears and Henry 2003). These authors have drawn attention to the fact that despite the rather dramatic increase in the acceptance of the principle of racial equality and integration among large numbers of whites over the past four decades, there remain indications of persisting racial antipathy and enduring racial inequalities (Crosby, Bromley, and Saxe 1980; Darity and Myers 1998; Forman 2001; Pettigrew 1985).

There is abundant evidence that racial prejudice persists as an important problem. For example, while large-scale surveys show overwhelming liberalization in racial thinking in response to traditional survey items, on survey items designed to capture the present-day racial climate there is evidence for the actual worsening of racial prejudice (see Forman 2004). As recent experimental results illustrate, the change in racial prejudice is one of kind rather than of degree. Using laboratory experiments, John Dovidio and his colleagues have shown that white college students are more likely to express distaste for or to discriminate against blacks when conditions enable them to do so without

having to directly acknowledge or confront their racist attitudes or behavior—for example, when their views can be masked by some other motive (see Dovidio 2001; Dovidio and Gaertner 2000; Hodson, Dovidio, and Gaertner 2002). Thomas Pettigrew and Roel Meertens (1995, 73) note that many individuals “express their negative views only in ostensibly nonprejudiced ways that ‘slip under the norm.’” Increasingly it seems apparent that those measures of racial attitudes traditionally deployed in surveys and other studies have limited utility for capturing racial dynamics in the post–civil rights period, a time when overt expressions of racial prejudice are discouraged (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Myers and Williamson 2001).

As many analysts have argued, tapping into these newer, subtler forms of racial prejudice requires the use of new measures (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Dovidio 2001; Forman 2001, 2004; Henry and Sears 2002; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Sears and Henry 2003). But measuring contemporary racial prejudice is not straightforward.¹ New measures must be able to capture the more passive and less explicit ways in which white racial antipathy is increasingly expressed. Building on Pettigrew and Meertens’s (1995) formulation of the absence of sympathy for an out-group (that is, the denial of emotions) as a new form of prejudice, in this chapter I develop a construct, *racial apathy*, that I argue is an especially good way to capture at least one manifestation of newer and subtler racial prejudice in the post–civil rights era. Broadly, racial apathy refers to lack of feeling or indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of engagement with race-related social issues. It is expressed in at least two ways: a lack of concern about racial and ethnic disparities and an unwillingness to address proximal and distal forms of racially disparate treatment. As Paul Wachtel (1999, 35–36) points out, this dimension has too often been overlooked:

Perhaps most important of all for whites to acknowledge and understand is [racial] indifference. . . . Perhaps no other feature of white attitudes and of the underlying attitudinal structure of white society as a whole is as cumulatively responsible for the pain and deprivation experienced by [racial minorities] at this point in our history as is [racial] indifference. At the same time, perhaps no feature is as misunderstood or overlooked.

Whereas historically most scholars have characterized racial prejudice as an overt manifestation of negative feelings about an out-group, in this chapter I focus instead on the expression of racial apathy toward, lack of care for, or disinterest in the social circumstances of racial and ethnic minorities as a new form of racial prejudice. I argue that contemporary racism plays an essential part in the construction of this newer and more subtle form of prejudice. Before examining the parameters and extent of this new prejudice, I explore an important antecedent to its expression, namely, contemporary racism.

THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY RACISM

Researchers have labeled these more subtle and covert forms of racism as *laissez-faire racism* (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997), *color-blind racism* (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), *cultural racism* (Jones 1999), *aversive racism* (Dovidio 2001), *symbolic racism* (Henry and Sears 2002; Sears and Henry 2003), *racial resentment* (Kinder and Sanders 1996), *modern racism* (McConahay 1986), and *subtle racism* (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995). Despite the fact that these authors differ in how they conceptualize the nature and content of contemporary racism, they share two common features. First, these authors theorize that new forms of racism emerged in the aftermath of the civil rights movement. Second, they argue that racism is not motivated by irrationality but rather by the desire to maintain a dominant social position in the racialized social system. I use the term “racism” here to represent a widely held ideology that enables either the full or—in more recent times—partial denial of opportunity and resources to particular racial and ethnic groups (for a similar perspective, see Mills 1997, 2000).²

I argue that the post–civil rights racial ideology should be called *color-blind racism*.³ As I use it here, color-blind racism encapsulates the general set of ideas that race does not matter in post–civil rights America and the claim by many Americans that they are personally color-blind and do not see race (see Gallagher 2003; Lewis 2001; Lewis, Chesler, and Forman 2000).⁴ The main beliefs of this racial ideology are: (1) U.S. society functions as a racial meritocracy; (2) for the most part these days people do not care about or even notice race; (3) any racialized patterns of social inequality that do persist are outcomes of individual and/or group-level cultural deficiency; and (4) because of the first three beliefs, nothing systematic (such as affirmative action) needs to be or should be done to redress racialized outcomes.

Color-blind ideology largely explains contemporary racial and ethnic inequality as the result of nonracial dynamics. It fosters a view that existing racial inequality must be the result of personal choices, not blocked opportunity. As Lewis Killian (1990, 4) observes, many whites

have accepted the victories of the Civil Rights Movement. They don’t object to sharing public accommodations with blacks and they will let their children go to school with them as long as there aren’t too many. They believe that blacks should have equal job opportunities and if a lot of them remain poor it must be because they don’t take advantage of the changes open to them.

It is important to note that, because color-blindness provides a seemingly neutral or nonracial basis for not redressing racial and ethnic inequalities, it serves as a barrier to doing so. Color-blindness explains away inequities, blaming the

victims of racial discrimination for their situation and, as Charles Gallagher (2003, 6) puts it, rendering the true origins of such inequality invisible: "Color-blindness hides white privilege behind a mask of assumed meritocracy while rendering invisible the institutional arrangements that perpetuate racial inequality." In this way color-blindness is a central mechanism used today in the United States to defend the racial status quo.

It is essential to point out, however, that the importance of color-blind racism in the post-civil rights era is not necessarily in the direct harm it inflicts on individual racial minorities, as was the case with Jim Crow racism. The importance of color-blindness lies instead in its indirect impact on racial and ethnic minorities' life chances through its creation of a societal climate that prevents many whites and some minorities from recognizing or taking actions to redress persistent and pervasive racial inequality. That is, a crucial limitation to the color-blind discourse is that it "blinds [us] to the effects of race and color in the world around us" (Lewis 2003, 192). The ethical protection of color-blindness ("I'm color-blind and therefore not responsible"), which leaves many whites free to participate in a system of inequality without feeling any accountability, is one of the main pillars of contemporary racial and ethnic inequality. In this way, whites are taken off the moral hook and individual and group cultural deficiencies are made the culprit for any persistent racial inequity.

As color-blind racism gains normative dominance in U.S. society, targeted efforts perceived as addressing contemporary racial and ethnic inequality in our society (affirmative action, for example) are increasingly deemed illegitimate and therefore stigmatized. Another important consequence of this emergent post-civil rights racial ideology is that individuals are not likely to express their prejudices toward racial minorities explicitly but rather are more likely to express their negative feelings in ways that are subtle or covert and enable plausible deniability, both to themselves and to others (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Myers and Williamson 2001). Racial apathy represents one new manifestation of negative feelings toward racial minorities. Unfortunately, our traditional conceptualization of prejudice does not allow us to fully capture this new development.

RECONCEPTUALIZING PREJUDICE

A review of the race and ethnic relations literature reveals broad diversity in conceptualizations and definitions of prejudice. In fact, this diversity prompted Patricia Devine and her colleagues to note that more than any other phenomenon, "how social psychologists have conceptualized prejudice has changed over time" (Devine, Plant, and Blair 2001, 198). The following lists present a number of the definitions of prejudice that are provided in the research literature. The thread connecting these diverse definitions is the idea that prejudice

is negative and contains both affective and cognitive components. However, it is also at this point that the varying definitions of prejudice part ways conceptually. To highlight these different conceptualizations of prejudice I have separated the definitions into two categories: traditional and alternative views of prejudice.

TRADITIONAL DEFINITIONS OF PREJUDICE

"Prejudice is an antipathy based upon a *fauity* and inflexible generalization" (Allport 1954, 10, emphasis added).

"Prejudice is a pattern of hostility in interpersonal relations which is directed against an entire group or against its individuals members; it fulfills a specific *irrational* function for its bearer" (Ackerman and Jahoda 1950, 3-4, emphasis added).

"Prejudiced attitudes . . . are *irrational*, unjust, intolerant dispositions towards other groups" (Milner 1975, 9, emphasis added).

"Prejudice is an *irrational* attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics, an unreasonable prejudice" (Better 2002, 19, emphasis added).

"Prejudice is an *unreasonable* negative attitude towards others because of their membership in a particular group" (Fishbein 1996, 5, emphasis added).

"Prejudice is shared feelings of acceptance-rejection, trust-distrust, and liking-disliking that characterizes attitudes toward specific groups" (Brewer and Kramer 1985, 230).

ALTERNATIVE DEFINITIONS OF PREJUDICE

"Prejudice is a failure of rationality or a *failure of justice* or a *failure of human-heartedness* in an individual's attitude toward members of another ethnic group" (Harding et al. 1969, 6, emphasis added).

"Prejudice against racial and ethnic groups is an antipathy [that] simultaneously violates two basic norms—the norm of rationality and the *norm of human-heartedness*" (Pettigrew 1980, 2-14, emphasis added).

"Prejudice refers to attitudes or propensities to *act in ways which disadvantage* individuals because of their group affiliation" (Leggion 1979, 9, emphasis added).

"Prejudice refers to an *organized predisposition* to respond in an unfavorable manner toward people from an ethnic group because of their ethnic affiliation" (Aboud 1988, 4, emphasis added).

"Prejudice is a set of attitudes which *causes, supports, or justifies* discrimination" (Rose 1951, 5, emphasis added).

The traditional conceptualization of prejudice has a number of advantages; most important is its focus on the negative and hostile nature of prejudice. Further, it typically focuses on the irrationality, faultiness, or unreasonableness of prejudice. An unfortunate consequence of this focus has been a tendency to narrowly conceptualize prejudice as a personality disorder. According to the sociologist Robin Williams (1988, 345), this view makes two important assumptions: "(1) The individual is a unit separable from 'society'; and (2) prejudices involve distortions of an external reality or departures from rationality." Thus, a common criticism of the traditional view of prejudice is that it ignores the larger social structure and power dynamics (see Blumer 1958; Bobo and Fox 2003; Jackman 1994; Williams 1988). By focusing on the irrationality of prejudice and ignoring social structural dynamics, the traditional conceptualization of prejudice is unable to account for some of the newer, subtler, and more covert manifestations of contemporary prejudice.

In contrast, the five alternative definitions of prejudice highlight the notion that prejudice is linked to a larger social system. This linkage results in a conceptualization of prejudice that acknowledges the role of irrationality but also considers the *failure of justice* (Harding et al. 1969) and the *violation of the norms of human-heartedness and justice* (Pettigrew 1980). Interestingly, two of the traditional definitions of prejudice highlight the role of unjust attitudes (see Milner 1975; Stephan 1999). For example, according to J. H. Harding and his colleagues, "prejudice violates the norm of rationality by being overgeneralized, rigid, and based on inadequate evidence; it violates the norm of justice because it fails to accord equal treatment to all members of society; and it violates the norm of human-heartedness in denying the basic humanity of [the] other" (cited in Duckitt 1992, 15). The incorporation of unjust attitudes and/or failure of human-heartedness into our definition of prejudice also provides conceptual leverage for understanding the changing expression of racial prejudice in U.S. society.

Moreover, the traditional view's focus on the irrationality or unreasonableness of prejudice implies that people have no rational reason (that is, nothing to gain) for expressing racial prejudice. In contrast, others have pointed out that "far from being deviant or abnormal, prejudice often becomes the normal and expected state of affairs in a society" (Levin and Levin 1982, 76). In line with this perspective, Richard Schermerhorn (1970, 6) argues that if social scientists have learned anything from their long-term study of the concept of prej-

udice, it is that prejudice "is *not* a little demon that emerges in people because they are depraved." Therefore, I argue that the expression of racial prejudice is not simply irrational but in fact serves an important social function in a racialized social system. Typically this function is to disadvantage an individual or socially defined group viewed as subordinate (see also Pettigrew 1980). As such, *racial prejudice* must be understood in a wider sense to include a possible irrational component and/or to include a failure of justice component. Further, this alternative conceptualization provides an important basis for considering racial apathy a contemporary form of racial prejudice.

Although racial prejudice has long been recognized to have both affective and cognitive dimensions, most of the previous research on contemporary racial prejudice has focused on the cognitive dimension (Pettigrew 1997, 2000; Shelton 2000). As Eric Vanman and Norman Miller (1993, 215) note, "A consideration of prejudice as a phenomenon in the mind rather than in the guts has its limits." Furthermore, the predominant focus on cognition in the study of prejudice is quite limited, since "affect is an inexorable force in intergroup relations. Encounters with members of different groups might activate beliefs and thoughts, but they are also likely to activate feelings and emotions" (Stroessner and Mackie 1993, 63). In fact, recent research has begun an important corrective by emphasizing the affective dimension of prejudice. For instance, Eliot Smith and his colleagues (Smith 1993; Smith and Ho 2002) have developed a new conceptualization of prejudice that highlights the affective dimension. Smith (1993, 304) defines prejudice as "a social emotion experienced with respect to one's social identity as a group member, with an outgroup as a target." Consistent with this definition, Marilyn Brewer and Roderick Kramer (1985, 231) note that although "the term 'prejudice' could be applied to the cognitive content of intergroup perceptions as well, typically it is used with reference to the affective or emotional component." In essence, by defining prejudice in this manner, it highlights the notion that feelings and emotions are central to intergroup dynamics.

This theoretical insight has spawned a number of empirical investigations concerning the role of intergroup emotions in shaping a range of outcomes. For instance, Thomas Pettigrew and his colleagues (Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Pettigrew et al. 1998; Pettigrew 2000) have investigated an important dimension of affective prejudice in Europe and the United States, namely, subtle prejudice. They argue that individuals express prejudice toward out-groups in ways that shift over time in response to changes in societal norms about socially appropriate ways to express dislike. Thus, subtle prejudice consists of three ways to express distaste in modern-day Europe and the United States that are thought to be socially acceptable: defense of traditional values, exaggeration of cultural differences, and denial of positive emotion. Drawing on large, nationally representative survey data from four European nations, Pettigrew and his colleagues show that subtle prejudice is

distinct from blatant prejudice and is independently linked to a variety of social policies concerning out-group members, even when other important factors are simultaneously controlled (see Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Pettigrew et al. 1998; Pettigrew 2000). Especially noteworthy in this work is the focus of Pettigrew and his colleagues on the withholding of positive emotions, such as sympathy or admiration, toward out-group members as an important dimension of subtle prejudice. In the next section, I build on this formulation of subtle prejudice as the denial of emotions by focusing on the absence of human-heartedness or denial of care as another form of subtle prejudice (that is, racial apathy). I speculate that the expression of racial apathy reflects not a true lack of care but a subtler distaste for out-group members.

RACIAL APATHY: THE NEW FACE OF RACIAL PREJUDICE

Several decades ago Jack Levin claimed that "if we fail to take action to halt discrimination or redress the grievances of minorities, we are acting against them" (Levin and Levin 1982, 58). Here he highlights the importance of recognizing a lack of action (for example, a failure to intervene in the face of injustice) as equivalent in some important ways to direct action against a group. In a similar vein I argue that the expression of racial apathy serves functions similar to those of explicit forms of prejudice of the past. In the post-civil rights era the expression of racial apathy represents passive support for the racial status quo in society. It facilitates the racial status quo by paralyzing individuals from acting to redress injustice. As color-blind racism becomes hegemonic in U.S. society more individuals are becoming indifferent to racial inequality. Racial apathy is often expressed because individuals believe that any existing racial inequities are the result of individual or group cultural deficiencies, not racial discrimination. Thus, the racially apathetic see little reason to be bothered by or to care about lingering inequities. Racial apathy is a subtle expression of a particular kind of dislike.

Theorizing the negative consequences of racial apathy is not entirely new. For instance, Daniel Katz (1960, 182) noted almost fifty years ago that

most research on attitudes has been directed at beliefs concerning the undesirable character of minority groups or of deviants, with accompanying feelings of distrust, contempt, and hatred. Many attitudes, however, are not the projection of repressed aggression but are expressions of apathy or withdrawal. The individual protects himself from a difficult or demanding world and salvages his self-respect by retreating within his own shell.

Here Katz argues that apathy is not truly a lack of opinion about a group, but an expression of a particular kind of dislike. Pettigrew (1980, 2-14) has

also discussed indifference as a form of prejudice. He argues that "violating the norm of 'human-heartedness' can result from fear and threat, or jealousy and envy; it can range from intense hatred to simple *indifference* and an *absence of human sympathy*." In fact, in recent work Pettigrew and his colleagues have argued that the absence of sympathy for out-group members in a number of European countries represents a new form of subtle prejudice (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Pettigrew et al. 1998; Pettigrew 2000). These patterns have also been observed in the United States. For instance, a recent study found that 43 percent of whites reported that they seldom (not too often, hardly ever, never) feel sympathy for blacks, and 48 percent indicated that they seldom feel admiration for blacks (Williams et al. 1999). As another analyst has recently pointed out, often when individuals say they do not feel anything or they are apathetic, "it can mask and underlie great cruelty . . . [and] can shape how [individuals] behave in powerful ways" (Johnson 1997, 66). This is quite consistent with the view that the "mind rarely, probably never, perceives any object with absolute indifference, that is, without feeling" (Sherrington 1890, as cited in Blumenthal 1977). Moreover, recent qualitative research confirms that expressions of racial apathy as conceptualized here easily coexist with persistent negative views about racial minorities. For example, studying everyday life in a white suburban enclave, recent ethnographic research describes the way in which young, middle-class whites discussed race-related matters: "When the topic of racial difference was posed to SWR [abbreviation for town name] students directly and in a more public context, they made it clear that they thought race was someone else's issue, one [with] which they did not need to bother" (Kenny 2000, 171). In more private settings, however, these same students were quite willing to express negative feelings toward racial minorities (Kenny 2000). As a construct, racial apathy captures the ways in which whites may publicly express indifference or lack of care about racial inequality while at the same time continuing to hold antiminority views.

There are at least two possible reasons why individuals express racial apathy. First, individuals may express indifference to racial inequality because they view those racial minorities who experience difficulty as having individual or group cultural deficiencies that justify their disadvantaged status. As a result, these individuals feel they have little reason to care about the social circumstances of these minorities. In essence, they deny the humanity of the disadvantaged. Daniel Bar-Tal (1990) has labeled this phenomenon *delegitimization*, by which he means the categorization of certain groups into negative social categories so as to exclude them from social acceptability. This view is also captured in Michael Katz's (1989) concept of the "undeserving poor." Although this term ostensibly refers to the work effort of the poor, in the post-civil rights era these moral judgments have been extended to racial minorities. The perception is that the deserving poor are white and work hard, whereas the undeserving poor are black or Latino as well as unemployed and receiving government assistance.

Thus, the disadvantaged status of many racial minorities is attributed to their lack of motivation and non-normative values.

Another possible reason for the expression of racial apathy is ignorance about the persistent nature of racial and ethnic inequality. One advantage of a focus on racial apathy is its ability to capture not only white indifference to racial inequality—their lack of an opinion or interest in the subject—but also the expression of whites' privileged status in the racialized social system in their ability to be structurally ignorant about racial discrimination or to not even think much about racial matters. Rather than being a thoughtful response to social realities, such a lack of thought about racial matters in some ways represents a strategic evasion of responsibility, or what Lorraine Kenny (2000) has called "sanctioned ignorance." James Baldwin (1955, 166) discussed the power of this sanctioned ignorance in his classic essay "Stranger in the Village," in which he argues that

there is a great deal of will power involved in the white man's naïveté . . . [he prefers] to keep the black man at a certain human remove because it is easier for him thus to preserve his simplicity and avoid being called to account for crimes committed by his forefathers, or his neighbors. He is inescapably aware, nevertheless, that he is in a better position in the world than black men are.

What Baldwin highlights here is the fact that despite being profoundly ignorant about the social circumstance of racial minorities, in many ways whites occupy a privileged position because of that very ignorance. For if they were to dispense with this ignorance, they would ultimately have to change their views and behavior toward racial minorities. This "naïveté" or "sanctioned ignorance" is an evasion that is closely linked to the pervasive racial residential segregation in our society.

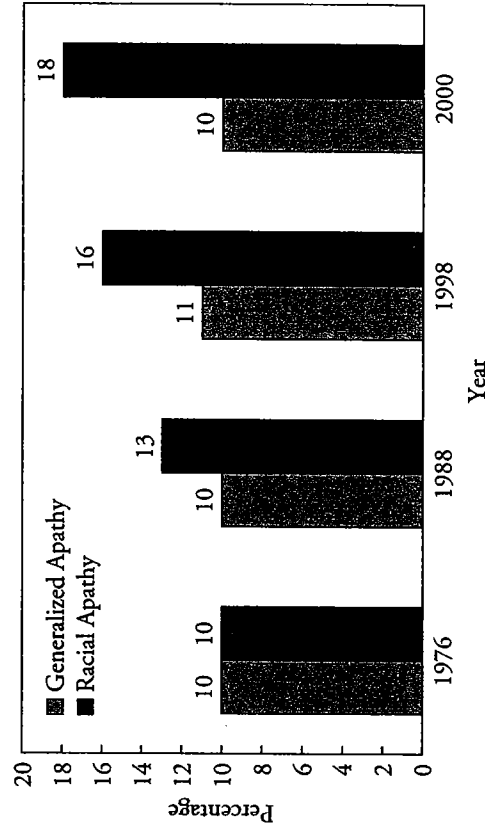
Whites continue to be the most racially isolated group in the country (Lewis 2001; Massey and Fischer 1999; Orfield and Lee 2004). Many whites live in almost-all-white suburban communities; a large body of recent work has clearly demonstrated that these communities are not accidentally this way (Lipsitz 1998; Massey and Denton 1993; Sugrue 1996). That is, living in such largely homogenous communities is representative not of a lack of racial dynamics but of participation (whether deliberate or accidental) in the very racialized phenomenon of segregation. On the other hand, although there is a racial component to the composition of these spaces, the racial motives, history, and practices that have led to their current demographics are largely unacknowledged, if not explicitly denied (see Lewis 2001). For example, Lorraine Kenny (2000, 6), in her ethnography of everyday life in white suburbia, describes the segregated spaces as the "anti-OtherAmerica"—a place intentionally built on imposing distance between white America and its Others" and based on both

"the exclusion of the Other and the denial of this practice." Thus, whites are often today deliberately situated so that they do not have to think about race regularly and can remain ignorant about contemporary discrimination, largely because they have insulated themselves from the racial "other." The construct of racial apathy represents a way to capture these kinds of deliberate evasions, destructive indifference, and powerful inaction.

NATIONAL FINDINGS

What is the extent of racial apathy and indifference in the United States? To answer this question I draw on survey data from several nationwide surveys. As a first step in examining changes in racial indifference among whites, figure 3.1 reports results for a measure of racial apathy and generalized apathy drawn from a large-scale survey since 1976 of young people about their social attitudes toward a broad range of questions. *Racial apathy* was measured by asking respondents whether they agreed or disagreed (on a scale from 1 = "disagree" to 5 = "agree") with the statement: "Maybe some minority groups do get unfair treatment, but that's no business of mine." The statement with which

FIGURE 3.1 CHANGES IN YOUNG WHITES' EXPRESSION OF RACIAL APATHY AND GENERALIZED APATHY, 1976 TO 2000

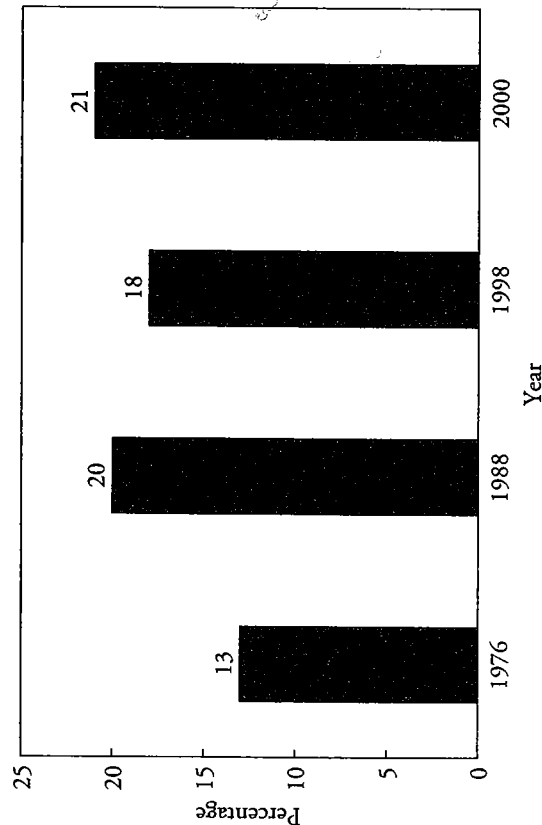


Source: Author's compilation.
Note: $p \leq .05$.

generalized apathy was measured was: "It's not really my problem if others are in trouble and need help." Here I am interested in comparing white youths' responses in 2000 with those given in 1998, 1988, and 1976. Two patterns are worth highlighting from these data. First, racial apathy shows movement toward increasing racial intolerance. That is, more young whites today agree (18 percent) with the statement that minority groups may receive unfair treatment but that is not their concern than did so in 1976 (10 percent). Second, there appears to be virtual stability in young whites' expression of generalized apathy. For example, approximately one in ten young whites today agree that it is not their problem if others need help; a similar number shared this view in 1976. This pattern of results indicates, at least with respect to young whites, that racial indifference is a perspective held by an increasing number of white youth. Further, this expressed racial apathy is distinct from the generalized apathy that is often attributed to young people. Rather, it is specific to a racialized notion of apathy.

Figure 3.2 reports the proportion of young whites responding "never" over time to the question: "How often do you worry about race relations?" (scale

FIGURE 3.2 CHANGE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG WHITES REPORTING THEY NEVER WORRY ABOUT RACE RELATIONS, 1976 TO 2000



Source: Author's compilation.
Note: $p \leq .05$.

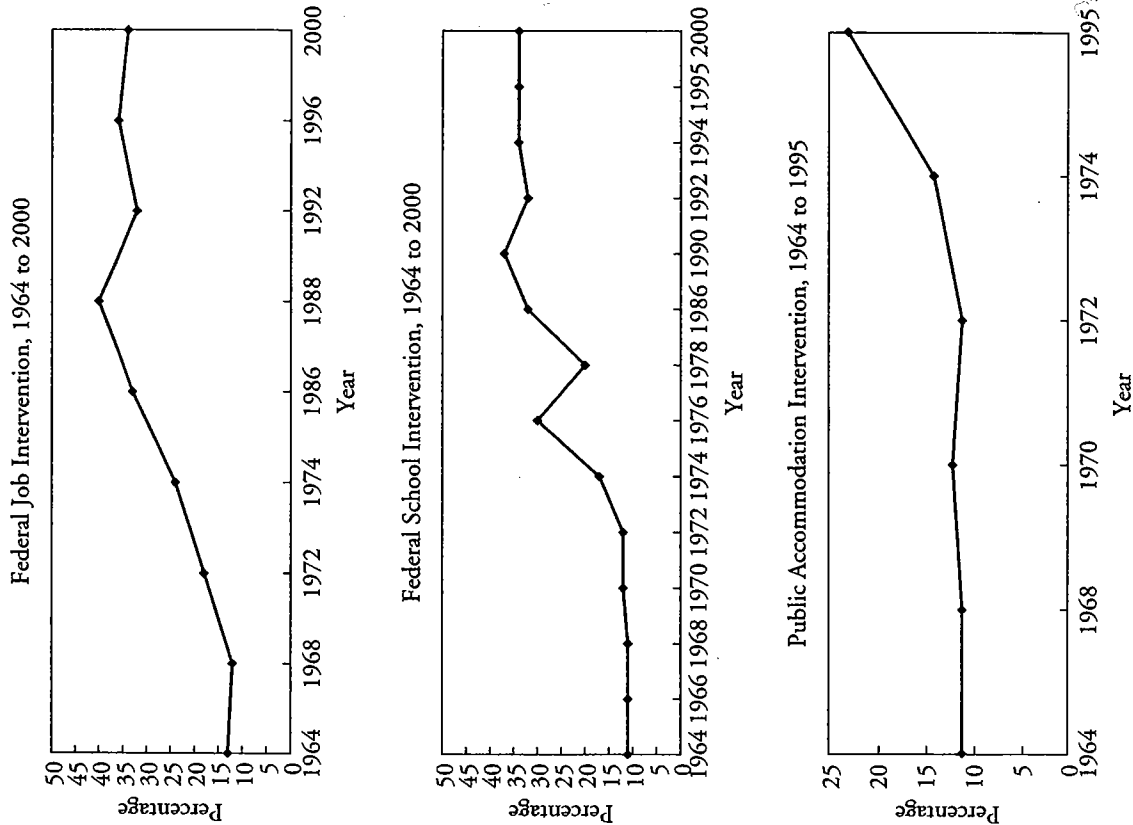
from 1 = "never" to 4 = "often"). An increasing number of young whites report never being concerned about race relations. For instance, whereas 13 percent of young whites reported never being concerned with race in 1976, by 2000, 21 percent of white youth expressed this view. Again, this pattern of change suggests that racial apathy in particular is on the rise, not generalized apathy.

Is racial indifference specific to the young? Unfortunately, comparable survey questions have not been asked of the general adult population. However, other questions have been asked of white adults continuously, in many cases for at least four decades (1964 to 2000). These questions provide some insight, albeit indirectly, about the prevalence of and shifts in racial indifference among white adults. The first set of questions comes from the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan. Surveys from ISR have included three questions about government intervention in matters of school integration, neighborhood integration, and workplace integration (see appendix to this chapter). Figure 3.3 graphically depicts changes over the past four decades in the proportion of white adults saying they have no interest in these questions on integration. These data indicate that increasing numbers of white adults are responding that they have no interest in the role that the government should play in ensuring integration in several life domains. For instance, the proportion of white adults saying they had no interest in the issue of school integration rose from approximately 11 percent in 1964 to 34 percent in 2000.

Does the rise in "no interest" and "don't know" responses reflect racial apathy and more general racial intolerance? I argue that it does. My interpretation of these survey responses is quite consistent with other recent research that has shown that some whites who harbor negative racial attitudes hide behind "don't know" responses (see Berinsky 1999). Furthermore, analysis of longitudinal data spanning the 1960s through the 1990s indicates that the pattern among whites of responding "don't know" or "no interest" is more likely today than it was in the past to reflect a strategic move to mask socially undesirable responses (Berinsky 2002). Similarly, Moshe Semyonov and his colleagues (2001), in a study of anti-foreigner sentiment in Germany, found that 29 percent of their German respondents refused to answer a question on the perceived size of the foreign population. When they examined these respondents' views on other questions in the survey, it was clear that they were more likely to have a deep hatred for foreigners than those who had responded.

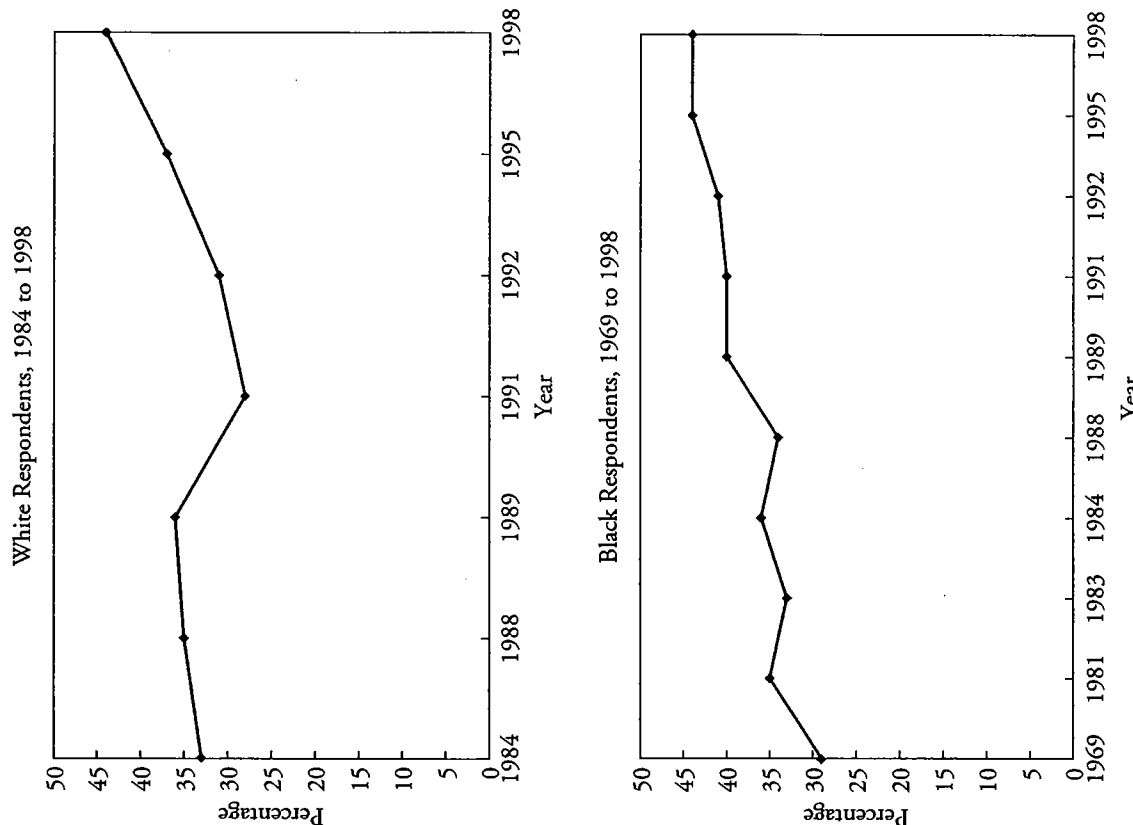
Figure 3.4 provides data that enable us to get a better assessment of the extent of racial apathy among white adults. It shows white and black responses to the "better break" question: "On the whole, do you think most white people want to see blacks get a better break, or do they want to keep blacks down, or don't you think they care either way?" Figure 3.4 reports the proportion of whites and blacks who say that whites "don't care either way." Two patterns

FIGURE 3.3 CHANGES IN THE PERCENTAGE OF WHITES SAYING THEY HAVE "NO INTEREST" IN INTEGRATION-RELATED ISSUES, 1964 TO 2000



Source: Author's compilation.
Note: $p \leq .05$.

FIGURE 3.4 CHANGES IN THE PERCENTAGE OF THOSE REPORTING THAT "WHITES DON'T CARE," BY RACE, 1969 TO 1998



Source: Author's compilation.
Note: $p \leq .05$.

revealed in this figure are worth emphasizing. First, in 1984, 33 percent of whites responded that "whites don't care"; by 1998, 44 percent of whites responded in this fashion. Second, there is substantial agreement among blacks and whites on this question, a rare occurrence in survey research on racial attitudes (see Kinder and Sanders 1996). Whereas 29 percent of blacks reported in 1969 (at the height of the urban riots) that "whites don't care," by 1998, 44 percent of blacks held this view. In short, there was an upward shift in the proportion of whites and blacks who believed that "whites don't care" about the plight of African Americans.

I believe that taken together these patterns of change in social attitudes reveal a growing level of racial apathy among young and old whites alike in the United States. These results are especially important because they provide additional empirical evidence for the changes that have occurred over the past three decades in whites' racial attitudes. They highlight the need to refine our measurement of racial attitudes to incorporate the increasingly subtle forms of their expression (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Dovidio 2001; Forman 2001).

CONCLUSION

As Lawrence Bobo highlights in this volume, "it is not enough to declare that race matters or that racism endures. The more demanding challenge is to account for how and why such a social construction comes to be reconstructed, refreshed, and enacted anew in very different times and places." Clearly, our efforts to eradicate racial and ethnic inequality will not be successful until we better understand the precise mechanisms reproducing it. In this chapter, I have argued that the expression of racial apathy is one mechanism by which racial and ethnic inequality endures. By being indifferent or ignoring the social reality of race in a racialized social system, whites and others sustain a system of inequality that restricts opportunities for many racial and ethnic minorities. As Bryan Fair (1997, xxiii) recently noted: "The problem of the twenty-first century will be the problem of color-blindness—the refusal of legislators, jurists, and most of American society to acknowledge the causes and current effects of racial caste and to adopt remedial policies to eliminate them." Those who are color-blind and racially apathetic to pervasive racial and ethnic inequality represent a "silent majority" in our society (Wiley 1973).

Almost four decades ago the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. (1996, 745) remarked in his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" that "we will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people." In other words, "what counts isn't just what [people] do, but even more what they don't do" (Johnson 2001, 114). The continued focus on traditional, overt Jim Crow

prejudice as the main cause of the dire circumstances that many racial and ethnic minorities experience, ironically, enables many whites to overlook their role in facilitating enduring racial and ethnic inequalities.

If in the face of entrenched, systemic, and institutionalized racism most whites say that they have no negative feelings toward racial minorities but that they feel no responsibility to do anything about enduring racial and ethnic inequalities and in fact object to any programmatic solutions to addressing those inequalities—is that progress or merely a new form of prejudice in its passive support for an unequal racial status quo? It is my view that it is the latter rather than the former. The expression of racial apathy in the post-civil rights era represents an action that is racist at least in its effect, if not in its intent. Hence, we must pay closer attention to its manifestation as an important and destructive force. Although this chapter represents just a first step in detailing the nature and extent of racial apathy in the United States today, it does highlight some possible new expressions of prejudice that demand methodological as well as conceptual innovation.

APPENDIX: QUESTION WORDING

MONITORING THE FUTURE SURVEY

Racial Apathy Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale the following statement: "Maybe some minority groups do get unfair treatment, but that's no business of mine." Possible responses ranged from "disagree" (1) to "agree" (5). High scores represent greater racial apathy.

Generalized Apathy Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale the following statement: "It's not really my problem if others are in trouble and need help." Possible responses ranged from "disagree" (1) to "agree" (5). High scores represent greater apathy.

Concern About Race Relations Respondents were asked to answer the following question on a four-point Likert-type scale: "Of all the problems facing the nation today, how often do you worry about race relations?" Possible responses ranged from "never" (1) to "often" (4).

INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH SURVEY

Federal School Intervention "Some people say that the government in Washington should see to it that white and black children go to the same schools. Others claim that this is not the government's business. Have you been interested enough in this question to favor one side over the other? [If yes] Do you think the government in Washington should see to it that white

and black children go to the same schools, or stay out of this area, as it is not its business?" Possible responses were "government should see to it" (1), "government should stay out" (2), or "no interest" (3).

Federal Job Intervention "Some people feel that if black people are not getting fair treatment in jobs, the government in Washington ought to see to it that they do. Others feel that this is not the federal government's business. Have you had enough interest in this question to favor one side over the other? [If yes] How do you feel? Should the government in Washington see to it that black people get fair treatment in jobs or is this not the federal government's business?" Possible responses were "government should see to it" (1), "government should stay out" (2), or "no interest" (3).

Public Accommodations Intervention "As you may know, Congress passed a bill that says that black people should have the right to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford, just like anybody else. Some people feel that this is something the government in Washington should support. Others feel that the government should stay out of this matter. Have you been interested enough in this to favor one side over the other? [If yes] Should the government support the right of black people to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford, or should it stay out of this matter?" Possible responses were "government should see to it" (1), "government should stay out" (2), or "no interest" (3).

GALLUP SURVEY

Better Break "On the whole, do you think most white people want to see blacks get a better break, or do they want to keep blacks down, or do you think they care either way?" Possible responses were "better break" (1), "keep blacks down" (2), or "don't care either way" (3).

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NOTES

1. Given the continuing existence of racial prejudice in society, albeit covertly expressed, some social psychologists have focused in recent years on more unobtrusive measures of prejudice. One form that this line of inquiry has taken has been to study implicit prejudice—biases of which individuals themselves may not even be aware (see Fazio et al. 1995; Blair 2001). One of the most common methods of measuring implicit prejudice is to use response-time latency procedures—in essence, the length of time it takes respondents to make particular associations that are either stereotypic or counterstereotypic (Cunningham, Preacher, and Banaji 2001). Several recent studies indicate that these implicit measures are an important predictor of socially sensitive behaviors, above and beyond traditional self-report measures of racial prejudice (Dovidio 2001; McConnell and Leibold 2001). Although these new developments in the study of racial prejudice are clearly important, a full discussion and integration of these works are beyond the scope of this chapter. Furthermore, I contend that more refined survey items can capture the new forms of prejudice.
2. By ideology I mean, following Jeffrey Prager (1982, 101), "an organized set of assumptions and presuppositions concerning social organization that orient thought and action in society and, if need be, are capable of articulation and rational defense."
3. There are clear conceptual similarities between *laissez-faire* racism and color-blind racism. They both highlight the importance of whites' beliefs in the cultural inferiority of racial minorities and their resistance to efforts that promote racial equality. The two conceptualizations differ in important respects as well. For instance, *laissez-faire* racism focuses on the persistence of negative racial stereotypes, whereas color-blind racism focuses on individuals' belief that U.S. society functions as a racial meritocracy and that people do not care about or even notice race. Nevertheless, it may well be the case that these differences mainly concern a difference in emphasis rather than substantive content.
4. I use the term "color-blind" here to highlight the idea that these beliefs are rooted in the notion of not seeing race. Though the irony of color-blindness is that, as Amanda Lewis (2003, 34) points out, "it attempts to mask the power of race as it simultaneously demonstrates precisely the difference race does make (that is, when one asserts that one does not pay attention to race, the implication is that to notice it would have deleterious outcomes)." That is, color-blindness contains within it implicit cynicism about our capacity to recognize and appreciate difference without also engaging in discrimination. As Michelle Alexander (2003, 10) puts

it, "The colorblindness ideal is premised on the notion that we, as a society, can never be trusted to see race and treat each other fairly, or with genuine compassion."

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4

INSTITUTIONAL PATTERNS AND
TRANSFORMATIONS: RACE AND ETHNICITY IN
HOUSING, EDUCATION, LABOR MARKETS,
RELIGION, AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE



Amanda E. Lewis, Maria Krysan,
Sharon M. Collins, Korie Edwards, and Geoff Ward

WHERE PEOPLE LIVE, go to school, work, and pray—as well as the system pur-
ported to protect them as they go about these and other pursuits—continues to
be fundamentally shaped by race and ethnicity. An individual's race and eth-
nicity shapes how he or she is treated by the institutions of housing, education,
labor markets, religion, and the criminal justice system, and issues of race and
ethnicity are embedded in how these institutions operate. This is not a new story.
But what is new are the particulars of how race and ethnicity operate and the
larger context within which they operate. Specifically, the manifestations and
expressions of racial stratification, prejudice, and discrimination have become
more subtle, and the causes and consequences correspondingly more complex.
Increases in immigration from Asia and Latin America, which have resulted
in a dramatic demographic change in the racial-ethnic composition of the
United States, have also made the dynamics of race and ethnicity more complex.

In this chapter, we examine five social institutions, providing a brief historical
context for each institution before reviewing recent trends in racial and ethnic in-
equality within it. We highlight the current key debates on the impact of race and
ethnicity on each of these institutions and then pose key questions for the future.
Within our discussion of each institution, our aim is to clarify how race and eth-
nicity play out at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Taken together, these
detailed examinations of five institutions provide important insights into how
race and ethnicity continue to affect individuals in their everyday life.